Requirement for Restriction

Applicants acknowledge the requirement for restriction of the Examiner. In response, claim 16 (directed to the non-elected invention) is cancelled.

Withdrawal of Finality of Official Action

As requested in applicants' paper filed December 28, 2001, applicants request withdrawal of the indication of Finality of the Official Action of November 1, 2001. As indicated in applicants' prior request, in the Official Action, the Examiner newly-cites Batti et al U.S. Patent No. 6,019,042 against the claims. This reference was previously made of record by the Examiner but not otherwise applied against the claims.

The claims were previously amended in response to the initial Official Action by cancellation of claims 1-7 and presentation of new claims 8-15. New claims 8-14 correspond to cancelled claims 1-7 and were rewritten to more clearly define the claimed invention. New claim 15 is directed to a preferred embodiment not otherwise recited in the claims.

The presentation of the amended claims did not necessitate the new ground of rejection, except for the fact that the

Examiner finds the prior rejection to be deficient in view of applicants' prior arguments. It is also noted that the Examiner makes no assertion that the amendment necessitated the new ground of rejection (which would in any event be without basis). In view of the above, applicants believe that the indication of Finality is premature, and should be withdrawn.

The Claimed Invention

Applicants' invention is directed to a cylindrical printing blanket comprising a seamless sleeve and a sheet-like blanket having a fabric layer, a compressive layer and a surface printing layer, said sheet-like blanket being bonded onto the outer surface of said seamless sleeve. A layer of a spirally wound thread in an adhesive is used to bond the blanket to the sleeve. Applicants' invention is neither disclosed nor suggested by the prior art.

Rejection under 35 USC 103(a)

Claims 8-15 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Batti et al in view of Okubo et al.

In support of the rejection, the Examiner takes the following position:

> "Batti et al teaches a cylindrical blanket that has a fabric layer (2) and another fabric layer (7) that is provided between a compressive surface layer and a printing surface layer, a compressive layer (3) and a surface printing layer (6). However, Batti et al doesn't teach the sheet-like blanket being bonded by a threaded layer. Okubo et al teaches the sheet-like blanket being bonded by a threaded layer (32a). To have a sheet-like blanket cylinder bonded by a threaded layer is obvious in view of the teachings of Okubo et al. It would have been obvious to modify Batti et al to have a cylinder bonded by a threaded layer to have a tight sealing agent on the cylinder."

This rejection respectfully is traversed to the extent deemed to apply to the claims as amended.

As discussed at column 1, lines 17-53 of Batti et al, printing blankets are classified into two types. The first type is a blanket produced continuously in the form of a roll and then cut to size according to the dimensions of the blanket cylinder upon which they are to be installed. The blanket of Batti et al belongs to this first type. The second type of blanket is individually manufactured for use with the blanket cylinder upon which it is to be installed and can be slid onto a blanket cylinder like a sleeve (i.e., a "sleeve printing blanket"). The claimed invention belongs to this second type of

printing blanket. The respective printing blankets are entirely distinct from one another.

Indeed, the claimed printing blanket can be differentiated from that of Batti et al in many ways as shown in the following table:

	Batti et al.	The claimed invention
Type	Sheet-like blanket (Cutting type blanket) See Fig. 1, for example.	Sleeve-like blanket See Fig. 1.
Feature (constitutional layer)	Fabric layer: Located on a side of the at least one reinforcing layer.	Thread layer: Spirally wound on an adhesive elastomer on the direct surface of seamless sleeve.
(Function)	Bounding of compressible layer and reinforcing layer (see col. 2, lines 48-51). Moisture absorption and adverse corrosive effect (see col. 4, lines 16-23).	Improvement of function holding the sleeve on the cylinder (see page 13).
(Tension)	No greater than 3% in both the length and cross direction (see col. 5, lines 34-44)	200-700g tension/a thread (see page 15, lines 17-20)
Application Method	Sheet-like blanket is wound on the cylinder under tension when used in printing	Sleeve-like blanket is installed to the cylinder.

It is clear from the above that the cited Batti et al patent neither discloses nor suggests the claimed invention.

The teachings of the Okubo et al reference do not cure the deficiencies of Batti et al. Okubo et al was discussed at length in applicants' prior response.

Okubo et al discloses a gapless blanket, which is produced by laminating various gapless layers on the sleeve. A thread (or non-stretchable layer) is wound on the compressible layer which is located on the upper position of the base layer in order to serve a holding function necessary for this type of blanket and stabilize the surface printing layer free from a distortion due to the presence of the compressible layer (see Figs. 1 and 2). By contrast, the claimed invention is characterized in that the thread layer is spirally wound on the bottom side of the compressive layer in order to tighten the sleeve. Applicants have found that higher durability can be achieved by an embodiment where the sleeve is held in place by the thread layer. See the disclosure at page 9 of the specification in this regard. Further, the sleeve-like blanket of the present invention can be attached to the printing cylinder without slipping even when used in high-speed printing.

As discussed in applicants' prior response, the following distinctions thus exist between the teachings of Okubo et al and the claimed invention:

(1) Applicants' claimed blanket has fabric layers instead of the base layer of Okubo et al;

(2) Okubo et al has a non-stretchable layer (the thread layer) between the compressive layer and the surface printing layer. In the present invention the thread layer is formed by winding a thread in spiral configuration on a sleeve via an adhesive elastomer, an embodiment which is distinct from the teachings of Okubo et al.

Further, the claimed blanket possesses advantages not otherwise possessed by the blanket of Okubo et al. The Examiner's attention is directed to the comparative data at Tables 8 and 9 of the instant specification. As discussed above, Comparative Example 2 in the present specification corresponds to the method of Example 3 of Okubo et al.

The results of Comparative Example 2 are discussed at page 45 of the specification as follows:

> "In Table 8, Comparative Example 2 that is the cylindrical printing blanket of the prior art experienced quicker setting of the upper layer due to creep since the thread layer formed over the compressive layer and below the printing layer by winding the thread while applying tension generates a compressive stress in the layers below the compressive layer. The cylindrical printing blanket of the present invention, on the other hand, does not experience early set in fatigue since the compressive layer is not subject to excessive

stress. Comparison of the amount of set in fatigue is shown in Fig. 3".

In view of the above distinctions that exist between the claimed invention and the cited prior art, and given the advantages over the cited prior art demonstrated to exist in the comparative data presented in the specification, the rejection is without basis and should be withdrawn.

The application is now believed to be in condition for allowance and an early indication of same is earnestly solicited.

In the event that any outstanding matters remain in this application, Applicants request that the Examiner contact James W. Hellwege (Reg. No. 28,808) at (703) 205-8000 to discuss such matters.

Applicant respectfully petitions under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a) and 1.17 for a one-month extension of time in which to respond to the Examiner's Office Action. The Extension of Time Fee in the amount of $ 110.00 is attached hereto.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any

additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Very truly yours,

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MARKED UP COPY OF CLAIM AMENDMENTS

8. (Amended) A cylindrical printing blanket comprising a seamless sleeve and a sheet-like blanket being bonded to an outer surface of said seamless sleeve, said sheet-like blanket comprising in order a fabric layer, a compressive layer and a surface printing layer, with said sheet-like blanket being bonded to an outer surface of said seamless sleeve by means of a thread layer spirally wound on an adhesive elastomer layer.

10. (Amended) The cylindrical printing blanket according to Claim [9] 8, wherein said thread is spirally wound on said sleeve mounted on a cylinder, said cylinder having a diameter of from 0.05 to 1.0% smaller than the diameter of a printing press cylinder upon which said printing blanket is to be mounted, with the diameter of said sleeve being equal to or slightly smaller than the diameter of said cylinder.